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Secretary Baker

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International Efforts for a Peaceful Cambodia

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Following is a prepared statement by Secretary Baker at the International Conference on Cambodia, Paris, July 30, 1989.

On behalf of President Bush and the American people, I want to express our deep appreciation to President Mitterrand. He took the initiative to organize this conference. And he understands the great issues at stake in our deliberations.

President Soeharto of Indonesia, Foreign Minister Alatas, his predecessor Dr. Mochtar, and their ASEAN [Association of South East Asian Nations] colleagues also merit our gratitude. They have held aloft the vision of a peaceful and prosperous Southeast Asia despite all obstacles. They have truly worked long and hard to bring us to this moment. Any actions we take here should be complementary to ASEAN's longstanding efforts.

I also wish to salute UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar, a true man of peace, for his continuing efforts to reconcile regional conflicts.

We are meeting here, today, because a decade and a half of violence and Vietnamese aggression have taken a terrible toll on the people of Cambodia. The twin tragedies of Khmer Rouge annihilation and Vietnamese occupation have left more than 1 million Cambodians dead. To the lives lost must be added the wounds inflicted on the society and the culture of the Khmer people and the instability that has continued to plague the region. The weight of the terror visited on the Cambodian people is too great for us to measure and too heavy for any people to bear.

The occupation should end. The violence should end. The suffering should end. We know the path to Cambodian internal reconciliation is likely to be long and arduous. But, today, we take the first steps. While moving forward, we must be mindful of the potential pitfalls that lie ahead.

Now Cambodia and, indeed, the entire international community face a tragic dilemma. Perhaps the folklore of Cambodia tells the dilemma best when it speaks of the day when the Khmer people will be forced to choose between being eaten by a tiger or devoured by a crocodile. This conference has been convened in belief that Cambodia can avoid the tragedy of such a choice. There is an alternative to the teeth of the Khmer Rouge or the jaws of foreign military domination. And that alternative can be found in a comprehensive settlement that gives the people of Cambodia both security and the chance to choose their own government, a settlement bound together by external and internal agreements.

Working toward that settlement is the purpose of this conference. We must find the political path that can lead Cambodia away from its war-torn past toward a constructive future. We can clear the way through international action and national reconciliation, both linked carefully together. And while this path will be difficult, I believe that a comprehensive settlement offers the best route to a better future.

The International Environment

Let me speak first to the international environment. Over the past several years, we have seen a dramatic easing of global tensions. There is a growing disposition to resolve regional conflicts through negotiation. And there is a growing appreciation that a lasting resolution of conflict depends on the expression of the people's will.

Our meeting, today, draws inspiration from this new direction in world affairs. But the signs of international conciliation need another signal, this time provided not by the international community but by the Cambodian people or, to be more precise, their leaders. It is clear to the United States, and it should be clear to all of us here, that any actions we might take to help Cambodia must be based on the will of the Cambodian parties themselves to move forward. A lasting peace will require self-determination by the people of Cambodia. International conciliation cannot become a substitute for national reconciliation.

That is why we believe a settlement that has any prospect of success must be comprehensive in its nature. Anything less would be a prescription for continued war. Today's war against foreign occupation would become tomorrow's civil war splintering further an already fragile land.

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A comprehensive solution has been the steadfast position of the United States, ASEAN, and our allies and friends throughout the decade-long search for peace in Cambodia. Our collective resolve in support of this position has helped pave the way for this meeting, especially our unrelenting opposition to Vietnamese aggression and occupation.

Healing the wounds and divisions of Cambodia is a task that demands the highest quality of leadership. Cambodia has such a leader. Prince Sihanouk personifies the Khmer nation and its quest for unity and national reconciliation. That is why the process of national reconciliation through the formation of an interim coalition government must be under Prince Sihanouk's leadership. It must reflect real power sharing, and it must provide executive authority to the Prince and the noncommunist resistance.

The United States strongly believes that the Khmer Rouge should play no role in Cambodia's future. We are prepared, however, to support Prince Sihanouk should he deem it necessary to accept the inclusion of all Khmer factions in an interim coalition or an interim authority. The strength of our support for any Cambodian Government, however, will directly and inversely depend on the extent of Khmer Rouge participation, if any, in that government. There must be safeguards that Pol Pot and other Khmer Rouge leaders responsible for mass murders will never dominate Cambodia again.

We also cannot accept a continuation of the present regime in Phnom Penh, which was established through Vietnamese aggression. We recognize, however, that elements of that regime are likely to be included in any transitional coalition.

I urge that all members of the conference work to foster the necessary acts of reconciliation under Prince Sihanouk's leadership.

UN Role as an International Control Mechanism

An effective international control mechanism under the auspices of the United Nations can play a crucial role in the peace process. It can facilitate a peaceful transfer from Vietnamese occupation to free elections, linking both external and internal aspects of a comprehensive settlement. Such a mechanism would serve three essential purposes.

First, it would assure international verification of a total withdrawal of all Vietnamese troops and advisers.

Second, the mechanism would improve the prospects of stability during the transition period, through peacekeeping activities such as monitoring a cease-fire and checking the disposition of the forces of the various Cambodian factions. It would also oversee the cessation of foreign military assistance to the four factions.

Third, the international control mechanism would have a vital role to play in the process of political transition. It would monitor a national census and supervise the repatriation of refugees. Most importantly, it would supervise, monitor, and verify free and fair elections. The United States stands ready to recognize the victor in such elections, regardless of the outcome. Ultimately, those elections are the key to an independent, neutral, and peaceful Cambodia.

We believe that only the United Nations has the experience, resources, and credibility to shoulder the massive responsibility of such a complex set of undertakings.

I must also emphasize once more that there is an integral link between the internal and external aspects of the settlement process. Without internal reconciliation, we would lack the basis upon which to establish the international control mechanism that I have described. Indeed, that mechanism could not function without a recognized interim government.

Vietnamese Withdrawal

To facilitate this critical process of national reconciliation, it is essential that Vietnam play a responsible role today and in the future. It must live up to its pledge to withdraw not later than September 30 and must not return again. But after more than a decade of occupation, Hanoi's political and moral obligations will not be met simply by withdrawing its forces from Cambodia and leaving behind either chaos or a regime imposed by force.

I think there is little disagreement among us that our collective responsibilities to regional security—and to the Cambodian people—do not end with a Vietnamese withdrawal. That withdrawal came about because we were faithful to our principles: we opposed the Vietnamese aggression, and we refused to accept it as permanent. Now that the Vietnamese occupation is ending at last, we must work together to help establish an independent, neutral, and stable Cambodia.

What we do here in this conference—or what we fail to do—will go far to determine whether such a just and durable peace emerges in Cambodia or whether Cambodia's future will resemble the tragedy of its recent past.

The purpose of this conference is not to prolong that tragedy but rather to find the path to a very different future. We will find that path, I believe, through a comprehensive settlement. And while the recent past holds little hope, we have arrived at a point where the imperatives of international conciliation intersect with the necessity for national reconciliation.

U.S. Position

Let me sum up our position. The United States is committed to a fair and just political process. We support a comprehensive settlement including not only a total and verified Vietnamese withdrawal but also an internal accord and an international control mechanism. We will respect the results of properly prepared and monitored free and fair elections.

All of the nations' participation in this conference can hasten the day when the killing fields of Cambodia can become the fertile fields of a peaceful and prosperous people. The monuments at Angkor Wat are a tribute to the Khmer spirit of long ago. Now is the time to raise a new monument to that spirit. We must lay the foundations for a new and lasting tranquility in Cambodia and throughout Southeast Asia.■

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